

No Ordinary Child

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 December 2017

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 0 0] Well, Christmas is one week and one day away. I believe how quickly the year's gone. I'm not sure if you're surviving the craziness of this time of year.

Of course, as Holmes said before, it is a great time of year because as Christians we particularly remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus, who was no ordinary child.

Now, I realise that for some parents and grandparents, they think that their children or grandchildren are no ordinary children either and they have to let the world know about it on Facebook and the like.

And so some parents do what is now commonly referred to as the humble brag where they brag about their children but do it in a humble way to try and cover it up. I remember reading one post where the parent said something like this on the next slide.

The parent said, I honestly envy parents with ordinary kids who aren't in the gifted and talented program like Maya Samantha. She has so much extra work and the travelling to the local university for classes at age 14 is really starting to cut into her all-star gymnastic practices.

[1 : 0 9] That's the humble brag that my child is no ordinary child. And then there's the straight-out brag, which is a bit more rude, actually.

So on the next post I saw, this is an American mum, Amelia, writes about her two-year-old son, Montana, and says, Robert, the dad, has been teaching Montana how to work his United States of America puzzle today.

Today Montana worked the entire puzzle by himself from start to finish. And if you're not impressed, then either A, you're jealous, or B, you have no clue what a two-year-old should and should not be able to do.

It's pretty rude, isn't it? In other words, my two-year-old is no ordinary two-year-old. But at Christmastime, we celebrate the birth of one who really was no ordinary child.

And while we see this in the traditional counts of his birth, in the books of Matthew and Luke particularly, John shows us in a grander way. For John draws back the curtain and gives us a glimpse of who this child is before his birth, who it was before his birth, and even before the creation of the world.

[2 : 1 9] And he does this so that we might believe that this one who was born is the Son of God, who makes God known and brings us life.

In fact, this is why John has written his biography of Jesus. So on the next slide, he gives us his purpose statement for his book. He says at the end of his book, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

See, John was one of those disciples who saw Jesus and what he did. And he has written this book so that people might believe in Jesus, whether it's for the first time to become a Christian, or whether it's for the millionth time to continue as a Christian.

John wants his readers to know who Jesus is and believe in him. But he begins in somewhat an unusual way.

[3 : 26] He introduces Jesus as the Word. So at point one in your outlines, verse one in your Bibles. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God.

And the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Now, I don't know about you, but this way of talking is a little conceptual and confusing, isn't it?

I mean, I can picture a baby born in a stable and wrapped in cloth. I can get that. But all this talk about the Word, it's a little abstract, and it can become confusing.

In fact, today we'll have to really think to understand what John is saying. So why does he start like this, particularly if he's trying to help people become Christians? Wouldn't you start in a simpler way?

Well, he starts like this because in the ancient world, it was not confusing. People were actually familiar with this idea of the Word, this thing that acted like a person, particularly in creation.

[4 : 30] It was part of Greek philosophy and the like. So although it's unusual for us, it was actually a common starting point for his first readers.

It would be like us using the idea of Christmas presents as a common starting point with non-Christians to talk about Jesus being the greatest present. And so John talks about Jesus as the Word, and he describes his character saying the Word was God.

A few years ago at Teachers Union Conference in the UK, one speaker was talking about how there was growing bad behavior in UK schools. And this teacher put it down to parents spoiling their children and treating them like gods.

Little Buddhas, she said. And so the headline on the next slide from the newspaper, The Mirror in the UK said, The Buddha generation pampering parents treat their kids like gods, says top teacher.

But despite what some parents may do and what most kids think about themselves, they are not gods, are they? Except this child.

[5 : 39] Before he was born, the Word was God. And yet he is also with God, as though there is more than one person of God.

And so already John is preparing his readers and us to realize that God is one God, but three persons. Father, Son, and Spirit. What we call the Trinity.

I used to explain the Trinity to children by using a picture of an old portable stereo. I like this one on the next slide. It was one stereo, but it had three distinct but equal players.

You know, they played music. You got the radio, the CD player at the top, and in the front, the cassette player. But the kids kept asking what a cassette was. And so the illustration kind of failed.

Though I hear they're making a comeback, actually, cassettes. But the point is, just as there is one stereo and three distinct players, so there is one God and three distinct persons. Or as John says in verse 1 here, the Word was God.

[6 : 40] Yeah, one God. And at the same time, he was with God, a distinct person. What's more, this Word, he says, brings life. Verse 3. John is pretty comprehensive in verse 3, isn't he?

All things were made through him, and nothing was made without him. Which means the Word had to be there from the beginning if everything was made through him.

The Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons say that Jesus the Son was created by the Father. But that cannot be true if he was with God in the beginning and everything was made through him.

Can't be true, can it? And in our first reading from Genesis, we saw that God spoke and his Word created the world. But now John is telling us that that Word that created the world is Jesus.

God used Jesus to create us and even sustain us. Hebrews 1 says that. You see, we are alive because of God's Word, Jesus.

[8 : 03] Did you realize that? Did you realize that without Jesus, we cannot have physical life? You see, this is no ordinary child we remember at Christmas, is it?

This is God the Son through whom God the Father brings life, both physically and spiritually. And just as God brought light out of darkness in creation, that was the first thing he created, if you remember, light out of darkness.

So the Word here in John brings light to darkness. So have a look at verse 4 again. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Light reveals things, doesn't it?

And when it's dark, we cannot see. And then you turn on the light, and it reveals everything, including the cockroaches that scamper across the floor. And in verse 4, we are told that in Jesus is life.

[9 : 10] And that this life, or perhaps better, his life is like a light to help us see. That is, Jesus' life helps us to see things as they really are.

It helps us to see who God really is. It helps us to see who we really are. It helps us to see how to live rightly in this world. He showed us this by his life.

And how to find life in the world to come. His life is like light for us, to help us see, you see. And we need this light, because as humans, we have rejected God, and we live in darkness.

We cannot see the right way to live in this world, even though we think we can. It explains why we have so many different moral standards.

Because we can't see what is the right one, and what is the wrong one. And we disagree. And so we just say, oh, well, what's true for you is true for you, and what's true for me is true for me. We accept them all.

[10 : 12] It's why we have so many different gods and religions, and say things like, all religions are the same, or all roads lead to God. Because we cannot see which is true and real, and which is not.

And we disagree over it. We are in darkness. And we need Jesus as our light to shine in the darkness, so that we can see, so that it can be revealed, if you like, what is real and what is right.

John will come back to this idea of revelation at the end. But for now, it's clear that this is no ordinary child we celebrate at Christmas. He is God the Son who brings life and light.

And to help us believe in this Jesus, which is John's purpose statement, if you remember, he points us to some witnesses to Jesus.

Point to verse 6. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.

[11 : 22] He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. The John here in verse 6 is John the Baptist. Not to be confused with John the disciple, who is writing this book.

So there's two Johns here. It's a bit confusing, I realize. It's called John 1, John 2. And we're told that John the Baptist came to testify about Jesus, to be an eyewitness, if you like, so that we might believe in him.

And what did John say about Jesus? Well, we give him one example in verse 15. John the Baptist testified concerning Jesus. He cried out, saying, this is the one I spoke about.

When I said, he who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. Now, again, it's a little bit confusing.

But what John is saying is, even though he started his ministry first and Jesus came after him second, Jesus is greater than him because Jesus has always been before him, before him in importance.

[12 : 29] And whether John realized it or not, before him in time as well. For the word always existed. The word was there in the beginning, before the creation and certainly before John the Baptist.

And this testimony of the Baptist still speaks to us today. That's why in verse 15, it's actually written in the present tense. Our translations don't have it, but it literally says, John the Baptist testifies present tense and cries out.

This testimony, you see, still speaks to us today. What's more, we also have John the disciples' testimony, too. Have a look at verse 14. So the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

And then John the disciple says, we have seen his glory. We've witnessed it. The glory of the one and only son who came from the father full of grace and truth.

And so we have eyewitness accounts to mention just here that we might know this one whose birth we celebrate at Christmas was no ordinary child, but God the son.

[13 : 40] Michelle was out shopping the other day up at Shopping Town and this random girl started talking to her. They were at the checkout and this girl was paying for her items using internet banking on her phone.

So she was just kind of waving her phone to pay for things. And as she did this, the girl turned and said to Michelle, I don't know how you survive without internet banking in the olden days.

Now, Michelle didn't know what to say mainly because she couldn't believe she was now regarded as part of the olden days. And so this girl just continued talking about how she had heard from others who were there in the olden days and went to bank tellers to get money out and ATMs.

It was incredible. But the point is, this girl relied on eyewitnesses to know what happened in the so-called olden days. Well, here are some of our eyewitnesses.

John the Baptist and John the disciple. That we might not know just not just what happened in Jesus' day, but who Jesus is. That we might believe in him. Of course, when Jesus did come in those days, he did not always.

[14 : 49] It was not always received with a warm reception. Point three, verse nine. It says, The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world.

And though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize or accept him. He came to that which was his own people, you know, the Jews. But his own did not receive him.

Here, the first response to Jesus is basically rejection, isn't it? No one likes being rejected, but can you imagine being rejected by the very world you made?

By the very people you came to save? Many of you know Steve Jobs was the founder of Apple, the computer company. But nine years after he created his company, he was kicked out of it.

And he writes that it was devastating for him being rejected by the very company he created. Of course, it was his own fault because he was well known as someone who was rude and very difficult to work with.

[15 : 52] But Jesus was not like that. And yet he was rejected by the very world he created and the very people he came to save. Can you imagine that? And yet this actually helps us not to panic when we see our world continuing to reject Jesus.

You see, with all the changes we've seen this past year in particular, the growing intolerance of true Christianity, sometimes I panic that God's kingdom is going to shrink.

I mean, just at our girls' school, the primary school just down the road from here, they decided not to do Christmas this year. No Christmas cards, no decorations, no talk of Christmas.

And one of the mums who's an atheist couldn't believe it because she likes Christmas. It's part of the culture, isn't it? And yet because it has Christian roots, the school has just said, no, no consultation with parents, just no Christmas.

And when that happens, when we feel like the world is shrinking in on us, we're not to panic because people have always rejected Jesus. And yet despite that rejection, God's kingdom has always grown.

[17 : 05] So we need not panic. For in the words of verse 5, the darkness has not overcome the light, Christ. The Jews may have rejected and crucified him, but they did not overcome him.

Jesus rose and now reigns, giving light to all who come to him and life to all who receive him. See verse 12? Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. John says that those who believe in Jesus were given the right, the authority to become God's children.

And we need that because we have no right to be God's children. We've all sinned. I mean, before being a Christian, we ignored God and we certainly disappointed God.

Even as Christians, we've ignored God and disappointed God. So we have no right to be God's children. Yet Christ died to pay for our sins so that he could give us for free the right to become God's children.

[18 : 17] And being God's children comes with life eternal, access to a heavenly father through prayer and assurance that he will never leave us nor forsake us.

And it comes with a family here and now that we can belong to and who can support us. But it's only by believing in Jesus that we can enter this family.

We cannot break into it by our own effort or connections. As John says in verse 13, we are not born into God's family based on our natural descent nor our parents' decisions. That's what the Jews thought.

They thought if you were born a Jew, then you were part of God's family automatically. Rather, John says only God gives us this new birth into his family. And he only does that when we believe in Jesus.

And so while we need not panic when people reject Jesus, we are to pray and keep proclaiming the name of Jesus. For he's the only way to enter God's family.

[19 : 19] But what's more, he's the only one who reveals God to us. Point four, verse 14. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came from the father, full of grace and truth. Here is the birth of Christ. Here is the word becoming human.

I noticed John says, we have seen him. He says, we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the father, full of grace and truth.

But we now know the truth, he's saying. And in this grace, in verse 16 to 17, reveals God in a greater way than the law of Moses ever could.

And so John concludes in verse 18 by saying, No one has ever seen God, but the one and only son who is himself God and in closest relationship with the father has made him known.

[20 : 25] This is where John has been heading since verse one. For John, this is the great news of Christmas, that God has come to earth so that we can know him.

You see, it is true that no one has ever seen God. After all, John chapter four will say God is spirit. And the problem with that is that we don't know what God is like. Or how we are to live.

We need some sort of revelation from God. Some sort of word from God. So that we can know him, what he is like and how to live. Without that, we are left to wonder and guess which is what the world does.

I grew up in the city of Wollongong in New South Wales. And there's this huge Buddhist temple that was built there as I was growing up. On the next slide is an aerial shot of the temple, which takes up a whole mountainside.

It's massive. Apparently, it's a tourist attraction now. And I visited there one time. Well, I wasn't a tourist. I lived there. But I visited there to just check it out. And at the front on the next slide was this massive statue of Buddha out the front.

[21 : 30] You don't get the size of this guy from the photo. But the thing is, if no one has ever seen God, how can they know this is what the true God looks like?

How can you know? And on the next slide, in a room, there was all these monks worshipping other statues together. And yet, if no one has ever seen God or heard from God, then how do they know this is what God wants?

You see, without any revelation from God, we are left to guess and wonder. But now that God has become flesh in Christ, then we can know what God is like.

We can know how he wants us to live and worship him. But it does mean that not every way is right.

I imagine that none of you have met my wife, Michelle. I know some of you haven't, actually. And I've talked about her before, but I imagine none of you have met her.

[22 : 43] And if I said to you, now, hands up if you think Michelle is shorter than me, and some of you might put up your hands. Then I said, well, hands up if you think Michelle is taller than me, and, you know, others might put up their hands.

And I'd say, hands up if you think Michelle is smarter than me, then all of you might put up your hands. And then I'd say, imagine someone said you're all right.

Is that logical? Is that true? You can't all be right. You can't think that Michelle is shorter than me and taller than me and both be right. One's right, one's wrong, isn't it? And the way to solve it is to bring my wife out and show you and see that she is just a little bit shorter than me.

But that's what God is, Jesus has done for God. See, people think God is like this or God is like that. But Jesus has entered into the world and says, no, God is like this. And that means we can't all be right.

There is one way. There is one truth. Jesus, the word, has become flesh and shown us exactly what God is like so that we can know him and know how to live.

[23 : 54] I remember visiting one of our church members, Eve Allardyce, at her nursing home, not last week, the week before. And she told me how she was having a conversation with one of her nurses who saw a Bible on her bed and started talking to her about how can she believe that God is real?

How can you believe, Eve, that God exists? How can you be sure of heaven and the like? And Eve said to me, I didn't know what to say to him. I thought about telling him that he shouldn't speak to me like this.

I pay his wage. But she said, I just said, well, what about Jesus? He was real.

He lived on earth. He died on a cross and rose again. And I said, Eve, that's exactly what to say. That's exactly what John is saying. The great news of Christmas is that we have proof for God's existence.

God came to earth and revealed himself to us in his son, Jesus. And what's more, he showed us that if we trust in him, we can have life eternal.

[25 : 02] We can become one of his children. So have you done that? Have you received Christ and believed in him? Are you a child of God? That first Christmas when the word became flesh is proof that God is real and wants to be known.

That's why he sent Jesus. So do you know God? Have you put your trust in Jesus? And for us who do, then Christmas also gives us confidence that we are not wasting our time or on the wrong track as Christians.

You see, every now and again, you know, as a pastor, I've kind of wondered just for a split second, have I just wasted my life here? Have I chosen the wrong career?

Have I been just massively hoodwinked? But at that very first Christmas when God became flesh, he showed us that he is real. He showed us that we are not wasting our time, that we are on the right track.

And so Christmas and the birth of Christ actually gives us confidence, you see. Well, parents may think their child is no ordinary child and of course, every child is special.

[26 : 11] But dare I say, reasonably ordinary. But Jesus was no ordinary child. He was God, the son, who brings both life and light.

And his birth was God's definitive word to us. That God is real and wants to be known. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for Christmas when we particularly remember the birth of Christ.

Christ. And we thank you that he is God and that because God came to earth, we can know that you are real.

We can know how to worship you. We can know how to live. And so Father, we pray that you might help us to live your way, to stick to your truth and to rejoice in the birth of your son.

For we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.